



## **Health Advisory**

For Immediate Release:  
September 23, 2003  
Media Contact:  
Jana Kettering, PIO  
538-6339

### **Increase in Pertussis Cases Along Wasatch Front**

(Salt Lake City, UT) – Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a contagious, vaccine preventable illness that is increasing in numbers along the Wasatch Front. The Utah Department of Health and four local health departments have noticed that the number of pertussis cases in Salt Lake, Davis, Utah, and Weber-Morgan health districts was higher than expected in August 2003. Twenty cases of pertussis was reported in August, compared to monthly averages of between one and 10 cases.

Both adults and children can get pertussis, but the bacterial disease is generally milder in adults. Five of the recently reported cases in Utah were in children under age 1, the age group in which pertussis is most serious. This group is also more susceptible to infection as they have not yet completed the series of pertussis vaccinations. Fortunately, none of the recent pertussis cases died, but four of the five children were hospitalized. The age range for cases was from under age one to age 73.

Because children can become seriously ill and possibly die from this disease, vaccination is strongly recommended. Children need to be vaccinated at 2, 4, 6, and 15-18 months of age, and again before entering grade school. It is important to keep your child fully immunized by following the above schedule. Children who miss doses of vaccine are at risk of severe illness.

Pertussis is very contagious and it is easy to infect nearly everyone in a household as well as some school or work contacts. The vaccine is only available for children under the age of 7. People are only protected for about 5-10 years after vaccination. This means that older children and adults are not protected against pertussis. Infected adults and older children can easily infect younger, un-vaccinated or partially vaccinated children in their

- MORE -

## **Page 2 of 2 - Increase in Pertussis Cases Along Wasatch Front**

household, school, church, etc., because they do not get as sick as infants and therefore may not seek treatment and may not know they have pertussis.

If your child has not yet had the DTaP immunization or has missed a dose, it is not too late to begin. The following recommendations can help your child stay well:

1. Ensure that your newborn child starts pertussis immunization now. Low cost immunization is available from your local health department and through the Vaccines for Children Program. For information on immunizations, call the Immunization Hotline 1-800-275-0659.
2. If your child has missed a regularly scheduled dose of vaccine, get a booster as soon as possible.
3. Cover your mouth when coughing or sneezing and wash your hands.
4. If adults or older children have symptoms of pertussis, which starts out like a cold and then proceeds to coughing spells, see your doctor. Your doctor can perform a test to make sure that you have pertussis and not a virus (which doesn't respond to antibiotics). Health care providers should consider and test for pertussis in patients of all ages with chronic cough.
5. If you are diagnosed with pertussis, or have contact of someone with pertussis, be sure to take all of the antibiotics that you are given. Antibiotics will reduce the spread of the illness to other family members.

For more information on this vaccine or others that are recommended to prevent other serious disease and illness, see the attached immunization schedule or visit [www.health.utah.gov](http://www.health.utah.gov).

- END -